



# News Release

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*Photos available on request.*

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**Gems, crystals and rocks from the Golden State**

## **Discover the State's Natural Riches at the California State Mining and Mineral Museum**

MARIPOSA – Discover California's rich natural legacy at the California State Mining and Mineral Museum, at the Mariposa County Fairgrounds, 1.8 miles south of Mariposa on historic Highway 49. The museum features minerals and gems from around the world as well as special rotating displays from private collections and other institutions.

The museum has the official California State Mineral Collection, with over 13,000 minerals, rocks, gems historic artifacts, fossils, and the crystalline gold Fricot Nugget, weighing approximately 201 troy ounces, the largest surviving one found during the Gold Rush. There is also a working scale model of a stamp mill demonstrating the process of gold extraction as well as examples of gold in various forms such as leaf gold, wire gold, gold nuggets and some of the finest specimens of crystalline gold ever found in the Mother lode.

Next to the museum is the Mining Tunnel, an underground trip through time, allowing visitors to see and experience what a miner's life was like during the later part of the Gold Rush. The 175-foot-long tunnel was constructed as a fairgrounds exhibit in the 1950s. It takes visitors underground into the hillside behind the museum. The timbering in the exhibit actually supports the weight of the dirt above; just like in a real mine. Dioramas depict the three main steps of mining: drilling holes to hold explosives, blasting, and mucking out the ore in ore carts.

In addition to gold, the museum exhibits tourmaline crystals and other gemstones found in San Diego and Riverside counties. Most of the tourmalines mined in San Diego at the turn of the century were exported to China because the Dowager Empress of China loved the pink variety of tourmaline found there (called rubellite.)

The museum features an exhibit of benitoite, California's state gemstone. Although microscopic crystals of benitoite have been found in other parts of the world, the only place where crystals big enough to be seen with the naked eye - and big enough to cut into gemstones – is a small section of southern San Benito County. Benitoite was first discovered in 1907. It is a beautiful cornflower, sapphire, or blue color, and when cut, it has the fire of diamond. Unfortunately, unlike a diamond, it is only as hard as quartz.

There is also an exhibit on zeolite minerals. Zeolites are interesting because they can be used as purifiers, and the zeolites in the museum's exhibit are particularly interesting because they were all found in the Los Angeles urban area. The exhibit demonstrates that you don't need to travel into the wilderness to collect minerals. They can be found in your backyard, even in big cities.

The museum has just completed updating their "Junior Ranger Adventure Guide." Activities in the guide can be completed during the time frame of a standard museum visit. Visitors are encouraged to ask museum staff members at the admissions desk for a copy. The program is designed for kids seven to twelve years of age.

Educators are invited to call the museum for information on curriculum based educational programs for grades one through twelve and college level.

For more information about California State Parks, go on-line to [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

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